IN THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE

"So they drew on towards the house (the house of the Interpreter) and when they came to the door they heard a great talk in the house."—Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress

A TALK ON POLITICS

INCLUDING THE STORY (NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED) OF HOW RICHARD CROKER HELPED WILLIAM C. WHITNEY ELECT GROVER CLEVELAND

THE Poet had quoted from the newspaper that supplied him with most of his original political opinions the regular complaint against quadrennial elections, and expressions like "whole nation convulsed," "people distracted from their customary pursuits," "hesitation on new ventures," "apprehension until the election is decided" flowed freely.

On Keeping Calm in a Campaign

BUT are you convulsed?—the Observer asked. Are you distracted from your customary pursuits? Do you know anybody who is? So far as I can see, bankers go on banking, farmers gather in their crops, poets poetize, preachers preach, the dying die, and everybody alive grows older during "presidential year" at much the same pace and with the same degree of success or failure as during other years. A great deal of nonsense is written about the profundity of the feelings aroused by presidential elections. For one thought that the average man gives to politics he gives a thousand—even during the campaign—to the commonplace concerns of life. The baby's tooth will keep you awake when you could sleep on "the menace to our country involved in the growth of socialism." You will feel more savagely toward the plumber than toward the man who is "determined on wrecking our institutions," and more worried over a gray hair on your temple than over the "aggressions of predatory wealth." Outside we appear furious about the prospects of the candidates; in our hearts we are like Sir Walter's little friend, "more than usual ca'm, we do not give a single d—n."

For most of us the campaign is a period of pleasurable excitement, and little more. We range ourselves on this side or that as native bent, intellectual pride, or family tradition impels us. We enjoy the too-infrequent opportunity of talking and being listened to, because our friends want to say something in reply. We are treated to free entertainments. Oratory is on top and we can hear at any street corner the familiar and easily digested sentiments so dear to American political crowds. We have the privilege of going out of nights to save our country, while smoking free cigars comfortably with our fellow Democrats or Republicans. We enjoy the distinction, much appreciated by all mankind, of marching through the streets behind a brass band. In short, we are partly spectators and partly participants in a huge, amusing game.

We talk about principles, but what are the principles that separate the two great parties at present? On free trade I belong to the party of Sam Randall and John G. Carlisle, and you to the party of Governor Cummins and Senator Hale. On the question of curtailing the powers of the judiciary I belong to the party of Bryan and Justice White, and you to the party of Roosevelt and Justice Brewer. I know I am a Democrat from the present leanings of some of my leaders, and I wonder if I am when I think of others. If I am a Democrat at all, I suppose it is not on account of the tariff (which I am half disposed to believe in as a

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beneficent or, at least, an inevitable feature of our government), or because I am passionately devoted to the initiative and referendum which has only recently swum into my life, but because my father before me was a Democrat. Equally profound reasons account for your Republicanism, no doubt.

The late Mr. McKinley was nominated on a platform advocating the single gold standard, although he was a bimetallist with a record of favoring the free coinage of silver. Up to the very moment when the committee on resolutions submitted its report he protested against the proposed currency plank. He talked very earnestly over the telephone from Canton, and gave his friends to believe that a declaration for the single standard would be dangerous. His spokesman, General Grosvenor, told everybody who would listen to him that it would mean the loss of Ohio. Even Mark Hanna was not sure of the wisdom of the policy. But when the supporters of the gold standard made their point, Mr. McKinley accepted the nomination with great cheerfulness. Now, no one with much brains in his head ever said or thought Mr. McKinley was dishonest. Probably he reckoned that it would be advisable to let the majority in the convention have their way about a question of relative unimportance so long as they were sound on the one vital point of nominating the best available Republican for the presidency.

McKinley's Anxiety in 1896

It was left for a Democrat to take a high, firm, and defiant attitude in defense of sound money. Judge Parker was willing to sacrifice his political prospects for the principle—and he was enthusiastically permitted to do the same. Mr. Roosevelt didn't ask foolish questions about the platform. If no platform had been adopted he would have run anyhow and, like the man in the familiar English story, "stood on his head." Besides, he realized that a president is his own best platform. Bernard Shaw was asked by a serious-minded controversialist who had been chasing the nimble humorist through a debate, "What are your principles, sir?" He replied: "I have no principles. I make them up as I go along."

So Mr. Roosevelt made his platform for himself as he went along, regardless of the proffered banalities of the professional platform makers. Mr. Roosevelt understands and plays "the game"—the broad, virile game of politics, much the biggest and most absorbing game of all. When Judge Parker opened the campaign in characteristic manner by sending a signed photograph of his handsome self to his antagonist, the gift almost made the sturdy Theodore ill. He couldn't believe that any man could take such a sappy view of the way to approach an opponent who, at that moment, was wondering where he ought to hit him. The general public, which doesn't care much about political principles, but intuitively sizes up men, found no trouble in naming the winner. Mr. Roosevelt was elected by a majority that dazed me (and I voted for Horatio Seymour); and Judge Parker, by almost universal consent, was permitted to take up the practice of law somewhere in New York City.

A Signed Photograph for Roosevelt

All great statesmen have known the game, and known how to play it well. Gladstone, at different times, was "the rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories," a Liberal leader, a Radical leader, the jailer of Parnell, the advocate of home rule in Ireland. For sixty years this great and good man played most attractively many antagonistic rules, having always in mind the control of the government by himself and the party that he belonged to at the time. It was the game that kept him going and kept him changing. And all the time he was a sincere and patriotic Britisher who would have died cheerfully for his country if the need called.

The late W. C. Whitney was a master in the game of politics; and well he might be, for he was the pupil of Tilden, who learned the game from Van Buren, who was the disciple of Jefferson. He was a constructive statesman as well. He will be long remembered—or would be if the American people had long memories—as the real creator of the navy that pleases us so much to-day. The story of his long fight against corruption and inefficiency in the Navy Department remains to be written. But his great passion was for the game of politics. He was not an enthusiastic admirer of Mr. Cleveland; he was even less enthusiastic after serving in his Cabinet than he had been before. Mr. Whitney really thought Mr. Cleveland was something of a "demagogue." Mr. Cleveland a demagogue! The two men were essentially antagonistic. Mr. Whitney's conception of politics was to build up a party by appealing to "the emotions of the people," and, having lodged this appeal, to secure competent leadership by an exchange of political favors among the most expert. He relied upon friendship, common interests, gratitude, both the real gratitude and

W. C. Whitney and Grover Cleveland

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the "lively expectation." Mr. Cleveland, on the contrary, kept his friendships and his politics as far apart as possible. As President he recognized no claim derived from past intimacies. He was glad to see old friends at the White House, but they came away no richer in office than when they went. If you were his friend, intimacy revealed traits of character in you that did not agree with his high ideals of what a government officer should be; whereas he knew less about a stranger, and thought more highly of him in consequence. At least, this is what the politicians used to say. Nevertheless Mr. Cleveland held and still holds his friends as he held and holds the good will and respect of most Americans.

Not even on the chief political question then before the public were the two men in agreement, for Mr. Cleveland was a tariff reformer, while Mr. Whitney was, if not a protectionist, at least very lukewarm on the subject of tariff revision. Yet it happened that Mr. Cleveland was nominated by a man temperamentally opposed to him, personally by no means an admirer, a disbeliever in his political methods and political theories, and elected through the exercise of the very qualities that Mr. Cleveland was most inattentive to as a politician.

Inside Story of the Battle of 1892

LATE in the winter of 1891 or early in the spring of 1892 Mr. Whitney came home from Europe. He did not expect to reenter politics. He was prepared to enjoy the peace with dignity which much money and highly esteemed services to the government had secured for him. But he hadn't been in this country long before the craving grew for the political game—the only game that aroused all the powers of his comprehensive mind. He found a peculiar situation. On the surface the Democratic party was opposed to the nomination of Cleveland and indifferent to the issue of tariff reform. Mr. Cleveland's own state was against him. Most of the party leaders, who nursed the sores of old snubs and discourtesies, were against him. The Democratic press of the cities was against him. But Mr. Whitney thought he detected a current setting toward Mr. Cleveland. He observed that the country papers printed a good many articles about him and tariff reform; that Democrats who had not held office and did not expect to were proud of Mr. Cleveland and anxious to show their respect for him. He began to think that "the emotions of the people" could be reached only through the nomination of Mr. Cleveland. And so, almost before he knew it, he found himself leading a Cleveland movement.

The details of the struggle that began cheerlessly in the spring and ended victoriously in the summer are well known. The leader had to ignore the wishes of Mr. Cleveland's own state, had to beat half a dozen "favorite sons" on their own ground, break cabals, influence public opinion through the press, beguile this disaffected politician with his inimitable charm of manner, influence that one by proving to him that he could only carry his own state or county ticket by putting Mr. Cleveland at the head of the national ticket. All these things he did not because he liked Mr. Cleveland, or because he expected anything from him, or would take anything from him, or would get anything if he would take it, but because he wanted the fun of fighting and the glory of winning.

He was nearly beaten on the very night of the nomination. He held a scant two-thirds of the delegates, and many of them he held insecurely.

A Nomination Made in a Thunderstorm

He knew that if the convention adjourned his majority would dwindle the more the delegates reflected on the argument which the New York delegation was driving home—that Mr. Cleveland's own state didn't want him. His opponents moved an adjournment, and the weather was on their side, for a terrific thunderstorm broke over the frail "wigwam." The building rocked in the gale, the rain poured through the roof, and the electric-light globes crashed down on the heads of the delegates. The wet and dejected Democrats wanted to go to their hotels, but Mr. Whitney commanded his lieutenants on the floor to hold them. And just before daybreak, amid crashing thunder, lightning, rain, the oratory of Bourke Cockran, and general prophecies of disaster, Mr. Cleveland was nominated. The newsboys were crying the news of the victory as Mr. Whitney walked back to the Richelieu Hotel.

But even then the leader was beginning to suffer misgivings. He had nominated Mr. Cleveland, but how was he going to elect him? There was a mutinous shallowness in the cheering that followed the announcement of the vote. The New York delegation sat silent and angry. What possible chance was there to elect a Democratic president without the support of New York?

He was no easier in his mind when he woke up. The situation looked hopeless. Information in telegrams and the tone of the papers that had time to make comment showed that the nomination had been received with profound

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coldness or with disappointment or resentment. Mr. Whitney was despondent. Who could reconcile so many hostile factions? What was to be done about New York? Particularly what was to be done about Tammany Hall? Mr. Cleveland and Tammany Hall had marked each other as enemies from the moment of Mr. Cleveland's entrance to public life. What if Tammany Hall should bolt? Tammany had precedents in its own recent political history for going its own way regardless of the national ticket.

While the campaign manager was pondering dolefully the possibilities of the situation, a knock came at the door, and Richard Croker stepped into the room. Did you ever see Croker? In those days he had the face of a sleepy panther, and the heavy but noiseless tread of that beast. To-day, his political claws cut, he lives in Ireland and breeds horses that win English Derbies. He recently discovered Egypt, and thereupon, for the first time in his life, showed surprise. People who have seen him in Ireland tell about him leaning on a fence, watching his cattle graze, and saying nothing for hours. But that is no change in him. So he always seemed—speechless, slow, patient, watching his cattle graze or gambol or fight, and selling them subsequently in the marketplace. You never would guess that there was a thought in his massive head. But for a good many years he sat, with half-closed eyes, at the head of the organization, while senators, congressmen, judges, mayors, corporation lawyers, and thousands of large and small politicians ran to him for their orders. It was this great man who came with soft awkwardness into Mr. Whitney's room, and was greeted with the peculiar air of friendly patronage that was one of the secrets of Whitney's control over men.

Richard Croker as He Was and as He Is

"Well, Croker," said Mr. Whitney, "we've beaten you, but we had to do it. I hope there is no bitterness. We must all turn in now and elect the ticket."

"Mr. Whitney," said the Boss, "I just come over to tell you that New York is all right. You needn't be afraid about that. Good day." And he slipped out before there was a chance to thank him.

The Boss Makes an Offer to Whitney

The visit turned the train of Mr. Whitney's thoughts. He began to have confidence. A cheerful state of mind begat inventiveness in him, and he began at once to plan the campaign. Evidences of discontent were all about him; the leaders went their separate ways sulkily without consulting him. He felt that some means must be found of dispersing the general gloom. Like most men of power, he believed in the occasional usefulness of a *coup de théâtre*. He determined to do something to "electrify" the party.

He first thought of getting up a "barbecue," where, amid the exhalations of roasting oxen and Democratic thousands, the candidate would diffidently accept the dignity and pledge himself to the eternal principles. But this idea he put aside almost at once, and decided that the way to make the Democracy sit up would be to tender the nomination to Mr. Cleveland in Madison Square Garden. But that, by itself, was not enough. With Croker's visit in his mind, he decided that the best way to move the "working Democracy" was to hold the meeting under the direction and with the manifest and enthusiastic approval of the very people who were supposed to resent most Mr. Cleveland's nomination. He was very cheerful when he got down at the Grand Central station, but he had not been many hours in New York before he encountered difficulties. Evidently "the word had not come down." Tammany was indifferent. The mayor wasn't sure that he "could see his way." In despair Mr. Whitney wired to Croker, who was at Richfield Springs, and asked him to come to New York. Croker came promptly, and Mr. Whitney told him his plans. The Boss sat impassive, with half-closed eyes looking nowhere. When Mr. Whitney finished his talk the Tammany man rose from his chair and said: "Let us go and see the mayor."

Whitney Runs into a Snag

They got into a cab and drove down-town. When they arrived at the city hall they were—they were admitted—that's the word—admitted to the office where the chief magistrate of the greatest city in the country sat. Mr. Whitney stated his mission.

"But, Mr. Whitney—" the mayor began.

"You'll do what Mr. Whitney says," said Croker, looking at the clock.

"I am—" began the mayor again.

"Whatever Mr. Whitney says you'll do," said Croker. "Will we be going up-town, Mr. Whitney?"

Croker Does Whitney a Favor

On the way up Mr. Whitney turned to the Boss and said: "Croker, I want to thank you

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for the way you have behaved. I wouldn't have thought it possible. I know you don't like Mr. Cleveland. You fought the nomination and I beat you; and now you do me a very great personal service. Will you tell me why?"

"Mr. Whitney," said Croker, "do you remember when I was tried for killing that man?"

Mr. Whitney's mind traveled back over twenty busy years. He had not forgotten the incident. He knew that the Boss of Tammany had been indicted and tried for murder. Mr. Whitney himself had been an active member of the committee that worked for his release. Croker, in those days, was an aggressive but inconspicuous politician. To the leaders of his faction he was comparatively unknown, but in his own neighborhood he was a figure full of menace, a silent, savage, rough-and-tumble warrior. When a man fell dead with a pistol-shot in his heart during a fight at the polls, it was a perfectly reasonable process, in the minds of his enemies, to "swear it onto Croker." The identity of the murderer was well known. The man was never tried, held a position of some trust afterward, and may still live. But you will never drag his name from the lips of those who know. It is like the Highland secret about the murderer of Campbell for which James of the Moor was hanged. Andrew Lang knows who it was who killed the kinsman of Argyll, but he couldn't tell Stevenson who wrote his best book about it. So many knew the name of the murderer, and among the number was Croker—none knew better. But Croker was charged with the crime, indicted, and arraigned. Meanwhile the report that an humble and outlying but worthy supporter was in danger got up to headquarters, and with it the assurance that "Dick hadn't done it." Mr. Whitney was then a young leader and the matter was passed on to him. He went to work at once and raised the money necessary for Croker's defense. It was $3,000—not much later, but much then. He took personal charge of the case as far as he could, and Croker eventually came off free, although beset by enemies on the witness-stand and with patrons, perhaps, beset by enemies on the bench.

A Murderer Whose Name is a Secret

Of course Mr. Whitney had not forgotten. But he had never thought of his work on the defense committee as done for Croker. It was part of his business as an organization man to save an organization man. It never occurred to him that Croker should be grateful. He had seen Croker occasionally after he rose in power, and, of course, knew a good deal about him. But before 1892 their meetings were infrequent, and when he undertook to nominate Mr. Cleveland he did not see Croker or attempt to influence him in any way. He didn't think there was any good in trying.

Croker "Gets Even" After Twenty Years

"Yes—why, yes," said Mr. Whitney; "I remember it very distinctly."

"Well," said Croker, "I've been waiting these twenty years to get even with you."

OF course, you will find a good many people who would say that McKinley never should have taken a nomination on a "gold platform," and that Whitney should have opposed the nomination of Cleveland, and that Cleveland should have spurned the support of Croker. Yet probably each of these men in his heart felt that the various "sacred principles" embodied in the platform were not absolutely so essential to the life of the nation as the spellbinders said, but that the country, under any régime and almost any theory of finance or government, would manage to get along pretty well. Politics is a human relation and is controlled by human virtues and vices, among them being an unextinguishable ambition, love of power, and delight in fighting. For man, as Lord Palmerston once remarked, is "by nature a quarreling and a fighting animal."

IT might—said the Philosopher—be different if the principles at stake were different. As you have said, no man can clearly define the line between the two great parties to-day. Moreover, hardly any thoughtful man believes that if all the measures proposed by either party were adopted, human misery, in the aggregate, would decrease, or the general comfort and well-being of the people increase. Political warfare has descended to the paltriness of a game, a game for power in national politics and a game for money in local politics.

I imagine that if the hour should ever strike again when a great issue should arise to appeal to heart and conscience, to the honor and the humane instincts of mankind, the game would break up, the cards and chips be scattered to the winds, and the politicians seek cover.

PERHAPS so—said the Observer. But I am sorry to say it was not so when slavery was the issue. There was as much politics in the Chicago convention of 1860 as in the Denver convention of 1908.

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